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RURAL FREE DELIVERY

Democratic Senators of Georgia
Claim Authorship for
THOMAS E. WATSON.

The rural free delivery of mail is growing so rapidly that one hesitates to name any figures tending to show the number of people served. As long ago as November, 1902, nearly twelve thousand routes had been established; the carriers engaged traveled 2,500 miles of country roads and served about seven millions of the strictly rural population with their daily mail. It is likely that the number is much nearer ten millions today.

Due credit must be given the republican administration for developing this gigantic system of rural free delivery. It is true that the republicans have been lavish money-spenders—but this is the first instance where public revenues have been expended under republican direction in the interest of ALL the people, instead of for a favored few—because it is just as desirable for the urbanite to be able to reach his rural brother by quick mail service, as it is for the rural citizen to be reached.

The greatest credit for any blessing to mankind is always accorded him in whose mind the thing originated. Nobody today thinks of giving credit to present day makers of steam engines for the application of steam power to manufacturing and transportation, but the public mind instinctively turns to Watts, Robert Fulton and a few others. The blessing of rural free delivery is due to the "energy and well directed efforts" of Hon. Thomas E. Watson of Georgia, the people's party candidate for president. He it was who, seeing free delivery of mail in the larger cities a grand success, and seeing Postmaster General Wanamaker's experiments with free delivery in smaller cities and towns (under the misleading name of "rural" delivery), conceived the idea that if the United States could expend the public revenues in delivering mail to the urban population, "equal rights to all, special privileges to none," absolutely demanded that the rural population should have similar service. Mr. Watson was too far-sighted a statesman to attempt the establishment of rural free delivery at one fell swoop. He knew the forces he had to deal with. He knew how difficult it would be to secure an appropriation to be expended in behalf of any but the beneficiaries of special privileges in control of the government. So his first demand was so modest—only a paltry \$10,000, a mere bagatelle to the spenders of billions of the people's money—that, with persistent watching and hard fighting, he finally secured what he asked.

For something like four years the postal authorities refused to expend the Watson appropriation; but finally a start was made in a small way, one of the first routes being out of Hyattsville, Md. So rapidly did the system spring into public favor that the republican administration was compelled to develop it, even in face of the knowledge that the socializing effects of rural free delivery must finally accomplish the overthrow of that party. For the farmer has been and still is the mainstay of the republican party; but after his intense individualism is worn away by the use of rural telephones, rural free delivery of mails, good roads and the like, he will be better equipped for co-operative action and this will ultimately take him away from the g. o. p. Co-operation among farmers has been difficult of accomplishment heretofore, because co-operation can not live without ready communication. And the rapid growth of farmers' co-operative shipping associations can in large measure be traced directly to that then unnoticed appropriation of ten thousand dollars secured by Mr. Watson.

Wherever a blessing to mankind has been introduced, it is not long before pretenders spring up on every hand claiming the credit for its discovery or introduction. Credit for the blessing of rural free delivery is due directly to Thomas E. Watson. As the Missouri World truthfully remarks: "Every one of the tens of thousands of rural mail boxes is a stump speech in favor of Tom Watson for president." And on election day there will

be tens of thousands of farmers who will remember the stump speech made by his mail box.

For the benefit of those who may be mystified by the claims and counter-claims of various individuals, The Independent has taken the trouble to make a thorough investigation of the Congressional Record. Last year both senators from Georgia (Clay and Bacon) made the claim in behalf of Mr. Watson and the state of Georgia for originating the idea of rural free delivery—and it was not controverted by any senator present. The following quotations from the record can be verified by any person who will take the trouble to do so:

Mr. Clay: Mr. President: I desire to say to the senator in charge of this bill that I wish to submit some remarks and that I shall not take more than ten or fifteen minutes of the time of the senate.

The Presiding Officer: Does the senator from Illinois yield to the senator from Georgia?

Mr. Mason: I yield to the senator for his remarks, but the senator from Maryland (Mr. McComas), has asked the privilege of offering an amendment, and I want the senator from Maryland to understand that after the senator from Georgia has finished he may offer it.

Mr. Clay: Mr. President, an examination of the Congressional Record of February 17, 1893, shows that the post-office appropriation bill was pending in the house of representatives, and when an item of free delivery service, including existing experimental free delivery offices, of \$11,254,943 was reached, Hon. T. E. Watson, who was then a member of the house of representatives from Georgia, introduced the following amendment:

For free delivery service, including existing experimental free delivery offices, \$11,254,943, of which sum \$10,000 shall be applied, under the direction of the postmaster general, to experimental free delivery in rural communities other than towns and villages.

Further examination of the Congressional Record shows the following colloquy to have taken place between members:

Mr. Holman: I reserve a point of order on that amendment.

Mr. Watson: This reduces the expenditure provided for in the bill.

Mr. Henderson of North Carolina: I desire to reserve a point of order.

The Chairman: A point of order has already been reserved.

Mr. Watson: Mr. Chairman, the paragraph under consideration provides for the expenditure of \$11,254,943 for free delivery service. My amendment reduces the amount of that expenditure and simply directs that the postmaster general shall apply \$10,000 of the appropriation to experimental free delivery in rural communities.

Mr. Loud: That is already provided for; the gentleman will accomplish nothing by his amendment.

Mr. Watson: It is not provided for in rural districts other than towns and villages. There is no experimental service in rural communities other than towns and villages.

Mr. Buchanan of New Jersey: You mean "truly rural."

Mr. Watson: Yes, sir; the real country.

Mr. Holman: I think there is some misapprehension as to the law on this subject. I would like to ask the gentleman from North Carolina in charge of this bill what the existing law is?

Mr. Henderson of North Carolina: There is no law on the subject providing for rural free delivery or experiments in that direction. There is a law which provides for experiments in small towns and villages, and forty-eight of these now have free delivery. That condition is preserved in this bill, but no provision is made for rural free delivery.

Mr. Watson: The present law provides for an experimental deliv-

ery in rural communities; but as I understand it—and the chairman of the committee, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. Henderson), makes the same statement to the house—the law has been construed to mean cities, towns, and villages, and there are now in operation experimental free deliveries in certain towns and villages.

The law expressly provides for rural communities, and it seems to me where the general laws make such provision there is no hardship in taking a small amount from the appropriation, only \$10,000, and appropriating it for experimental free delivery in absolutely rural communities; that is to say, in the country pure and simple, amongst the farmers, in those neighborhoods where they do not get their mail more than once in every two weeks, and where these deserving people have settled in communities one hundred years old and do not receive a newspaper that it not two weeks behind the times.

The amendment was adopted by a vote of 79 yeas to 41 nays. Mr. Watson introduced his amendment to experiment in the free rural delivery service, carrying \$10,000 for this purpose, less than ten years ago, which, from the best information I have been able to obtain, carried the first appropriation ever made by congress for rural free delivery.

Mr. Wanamaker had tried what he called free delivery in towns and villages, but the experiment had not been made for free delivery of country mails. Who would have thought that the good work begun by this distinguished Georgian ten years ago would have grown to such magnitude in so short a period of time? When this amendment was introduced the public mind had not grasped the importance of this subject, and few comprehended the great good that would flow from this humble beginning in so short a period.

In 1897 the appropriation grew to \$40,000, and only forty-four routes were in operation. In 1898 the appropriation was increased to \$50,000, and 148 routes were established. In 1899 the appropriation was increased to \$150,000, and the routes had grown to 391. In 1900 \$450,000 was appropriated for this purpose, and the number of routes increased to 1,276. In 1901 \$1,750,000 was appropriated, and the routes had increased to 4,301. And in 1902, \$3,993,740 was appropriated for the same purpose, and the routes laid off and put in operation had increased to 8,476.

On November 1, 11,650 routes had been established, and the carriers engaged in taking the mails to the farmers traveled 275,000 miles of country roads to serve about 7,000,000 of the strictly rural population of the United States. The area covered by these routes is fully 300,000 square miles. The popular demand for the further extension of this service has been so great as to force congress to appropriate \$12,000,000 during the present session to further extend this service. There is no reason to expect a decrease in this popular demand for rural free delivery until all available sections of the country have been covered by the service.

Wherever this service has been established there has been a sturdy and healthy increase in the gross receipts of the postoffices in the locality in which free delivery has been put in operation, and there has also been large increase in the revenues, and in all probability when the system is thoroughly established the increased receipts will more than meet the increased expenditures.

The popular demand and the marvelous growth of this great work demonstrate that the farmers are benefited by the service. On July 1, 1901, 4,301 free delivery routes were in operation, and during the year 4,165 routes were established, an average of 347 a month. The service practically doubled in twelve months. On July 1, 1901, 10,243 petitions had been filed with the postoffice department asking for free rural delivery routes.

During the year 1902, 12,402 additional petitions were filed.

Thus it will be seen that the number of petitions received during this last year exceeded by over 2,000 the total number filed heretofore. This is the highest evidence of the increasing popularity of rural free delivery and shows a universal desire from the people for the completion of the service throughout the country. The report of the postmaster general shows that from the beginning the demand for the service has far exceeded the ability of the department to establish it, and that since July 1, 1902, about 2,400 petitions have been received—about 600 per month. The demands are growing every day for the completion of the service.

The postmaster general informs us that the requests for this service are usually accompanied by the expressed expectation of the petitioners that the routes will be established at once. Nothing short of immediate action by the department satisfies them. They know their neighbors are enjoying the service, and can not understand why it is not extended to them at once. He further tells us in his report that every part of the country is clamorous for this service; and from those sections where the least interest was formerly manifested, and the people, from a lack of proper understanding of the matter, seemed loath to accept the benefits of free rural delivery, and were even antagonistic to it, the demands for the service and impatience for prompt action are now perhaps the greatest.

Well has the postmaster general said that free rural delivery is no longer in the experimental stage, but has become an established fact. Experiments thus far made have been most satisfactory, and its adoption as a permanent feature of postal administration is assured. Reports show conclusively that the value of isolated farms have been enhanced because of the service. Farmers have been brought in close touch with the markets by receiving their mails daily.

The social and educational benefits conferred by the mail being brought daily to the farmer's home are incalculable. The city and the country are brought into close connection and the farmer is somewhat relieved from the monotony of rural life and given an equal opportunity to keep abreast with his neighbor in the city.

It has been estimated that the territory of the United States available for rural free delivery embraces about 4 million square miles, or about one-third of the country's area, excluding Alaska. The routes now in operation cover a little more than 300,000 square miles, so that almost one-third of the available territory has already been provided with the service. Within the next three years the service can be completed, and there should be no halt in this work, for the people are demanding it with earnestness, and the sooner the service is completed the more quickly will the effect of its influence be felt upon the postal revenue.

Should the extension of the service hereafter be made at the rate of 12,000 routes per year until it becomes universal, within the next three years the work will be completed. Then nearly 20,000,000 farmers who heretofore have been given little opportunity to enjoy the benefits of daily mail facilities will receive their mails daily and country life will be relieved of isolation, and the farmer will be put upon an equal footing with his city neighbor.

The farmer will receive more direct benefit from the \$24,000,000 annually appropriated to carry on the system after completed than he has received heretofore from the vast sums appropriated annually to delay the expenses of the government. Country life will become more attractive, the farmers will keep in daily touch with the events of importance transpiring, daily newspapers will find their way into the country homes, all classes will be brought into close touch with each other, the farmer will be quick to avail himself of every opportunity to improve his condition, to take advan-